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JANUARY 30 1984

Dear Senator Bradley:

The Secretary has asked me to reply to your thoughtful letter of December 16 about United States policy toward the Afghan resistance. You urge greater support for the mujahidin, increased efforts to keep the Afghan situation before world public opinion, and more generous levels of international humanitarian assistance for the Afghan refugees in Pakistan. I know of your long-term interest in Afghanistan and deep concern for that country's fate in the face of the brutal Soviet invasion and occupation.

In general, the Afghan resistance did very well in 1983. They are better armed and trained than ever before, and have displayed more cooperation in military engagements with the Soviet/DRA forces. This was particularly evident in campaigns in the eastern part of Afghanistan, in Paktia and Paktika provinces, in the early fall, and in the southern Shomali area in late November and early December. At Guldara, in the first days of December, a large body of mujahidin from different groups decided to stand together against a large Soviet force of 2,500 men, and although taking heavy casualties themselves, were described as jubilant with the losses they inflicted on the Soviets. The mujahidin have also displayed increased proficiency in ambushing Soviet/DRA supply convoys. Moreover, Soviet helicopter and fixed wing aircraft losses in 1983 were significantly higher than losses in 1982. In the face of Soviet strategy designed to inflict severe devastation on civilian areas of important strategic interest or suspected strong support for the mujahidin, it is amazing how the Afghan resistance's determination to continue the struggle against the Soviets has endured. Although we share your concern about how long such steadfastness can be maintained while the search for a negotiated political settlement with the Soviets goes on, the mujahidin will to continue the freedom struggle appears indomitable.

The Honorable
Bill Bradley,
United States Senate.

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I agree with you completely about the need to focus world attention on the tragedy unfolding in Afghanistan. The United States Information Agency, through articles, pamphlets, speakers, and video tapes, has made a serious and consistent effort through our posts abroad to keep the issue of Afghanistan alive internationally. In this country there have been a series of scholarly conferences, visits by Afghan resistance figures, and briefings to which the State Department has given its total cooperation. In order to remind American and world public opinion that December 27 marked the fourth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and that the struggle for freedom still goes on there, the Department of State, with the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Center for Afghanistan Studies, headed by Dean Tom Gouttierre, sponsored a National Forum on Afghanistan on December 12 and 13 in the Department of State. One of the major topics addressed by a panel of media figures was the question of "Afghanistan and the Evening News." All the panel participants and those attending the Forum agreed that in spite of the inherent physical difficulties facing journalists travelling with the mujahidin, there needs to be more coverage of Afghanistan. The question remains, however, of why the networks and major papers do not send reporters to go in with the resistance and why they do not carry more news about Afghanistan. One participant, Henry Bradsher, a former journalist and author on Afghanistan, suggested that in spite of Afghanistan's strategic and other importance, there is a lack of immediacy about the issue in the sense that there are simply not any major policy issues pending. Whatever the reasons, there is clearly a need for more news coverage of Afghanistan, and the Department of State will do what it can to foster it.

Concerning the question of humanitarian aid to Afghan refugees, the United States Government has done a great deal since the beginning of the Afghan refugee relief program early in 1980 to ease the plight of what is now the world's largest refugee population. We have contributed over \$300 million, most of it going to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees -- who, by the Government of Pakistan, has been delegated overall responsibility for coordinating international relief efforts -- and to the World Food Program. We believe this has been a very well-run and humane refugee operation, which has met the basic needs of the refugees. Most of the credit goes to the Government of Pakistan. Through our Embassy in Islamabad and our Consulate in Peshawar we watch the refugee situation carefully, and try to remain sensitive to whatever needs might arise.

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I realize that my letter may not be totally responsive to some of the questions you raised. I would like to assure you that all questions concerning Afghanistan remain under constant review at the highest levels of this Administration. President Reagan has made it clear that the United States will not abandon the cause of Afghanistan and the Afghan people's struggle for freedom against the Soviet invader. In his statement of December 27, on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the Soviet invasion, the President said, "We do not forget that the tragic war in Afghanistan continues ... Let us resolve that their quest for freedom will prevail, and that Afghanistan will become, once again, an independent member of the family of nations."

I know the Secretary appreciates your interest in Afghanistan, and your offer to be of assistance. This will be useful to us in 1984 as the United States, along with others, continues the search for a negotiated settlement that will get the Soviet forces out of Afghanistan and end the agony of the Afghan people.

With cordial regards,

Sincerely,

W

W. Tapley Bennett, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs

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